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KC-area engineering firms do well in national rankings

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The Kansas City Star

Kansas City's two largest engineering firms expect to hire a total of 350 additional employees this year as the area continues to live up to its national reputation as an industry hub.

Three of the nation's top 20 engineering firms are based in the metro area, according to the latest annual survey of Engineering News-Record, a respected trade publication. Nine others nine made the magazine's top 500.

And executives at two of the larger firms, Black & Veatch and Burns & McDonnell, say they expect significantly more hiring in 2011.

Overland Park-based Black & Veatch plans to add 430 employees companywide, 200 in the area, and Burns & McDonnell, which is expanding its headquarters on Ward Parkway, expects to hire 300 additional staff, about half locally.

According to Engineering News-Record, Black & Veatch was the 16th largest design firm overall in the U.S. last year, down from 14th in 2009, and ranked No. 1 in the power and telecommunications categories. It also ranked 15th in international business.

Revenues generated by Black & Veatch's telecommunications operation have increased from \$63 million four years ago to \$347 million in 2010, according to the company.

The firm is expecting more growth this year as it pursues a Sprint-Samsung Network Vision project. Black & Veatch employs 8,100 people companywide, with 3,000 in the Kansas City area.

"Communications infrastructure is rapidly improving the quality of life around the world and provides economic and improved operation efficiencies for businesses and governments," Len Rodman, Black & Veatch's top executive, said in a statement.

Black & Veatch also plans to build a 15,000-square-foot operations and training center in Lenexa this year.

HNTB Cos. of Kansas City moved up two spots to 17th overall in the trade magazine's rankings for 2010, and was the fourth largest in the transportation category.

Burns & McDonnell of Kansas City was 20th, up from 22nd, and it ranked sixth in the power category.

"We weren't surprised, but we certainly like it," said Greg Graves, chairman and CEO of Burns & McDonnell. "As an employee-owned firm, our most important goals aren't ranking; we're more focused on return to our owners.

"What doesn't surprise me is that our culture shows better in bad economic times even more than good."

Graves said Burns & Mac experienced strong growth in its aviation and facilities group, as well as in its transmission and distribution group. The company employs 3,100 people nationwide and 2,100 locally.

This year, the engineering firm is taking over the entire campus formerly occupied by Marion Laboratories at 9300 Ward Parkway. It's occupying space vacated by JPMorgan Retirement Plan Services, which is moving to the Sprint campus in Overland Park.

HNTB experienced continued growth in its core transportation sector. However, the firm has no big hiring plans, said Kevin Wallace, leader of the Kansas City office.

“Our success over the last year is not anything we’ve done differently,” he said. “Our infrastructure practice has been our focus. I can’t say we have huge plans for aggressive hiring, but we’re taking a strategic approach to hiring.”

HNTB employs 3,800 people overall, with 700 in the metropolitan area.

The other local firms making the top 200 list for 2010 are in the accompanying chart.

The local firms making the top 200 list for their 2010 design revenues

	HQ	2010	2009
Black & Veatch	Overland Park	16	14
HNTB	Kansas City	17	19
Burns & McDonnell	Kansas City	20	22
Terracon Consultants	Olathe	38	41
TranSystems Corp.	Kansas City	56	57
Populous	Kansas City	107	86
CRB	Kansas City	154	165
Henderson Engineers	Lenexa	178	185
Shafer Kline & Warren	Lenexa	270	284
GBA	Lenexa	329	334
Sega	Overland Park	420	410
Gould Evans	Kansas City	458	366

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